

*(Note: Monte Noelke is recuperating from major surgery, so until he mans the keyboard again, we thought we would pull some Shortgrass Country from the files.)*

The Fourth of July holiday was a bit different over at my house this year. Half of the eight children had summer colds and the remainder were just spoiling for a chance to wallop the sick ones for keeping the family from our traditional picnic spot, the nearby river.

Our situation was far from the cozy scene which ladies' magazines are always presenting for the benefit of young couples. But comparing it to other Independence Day celebrations we've weathered, the day was much below par. We consider as "above par" the occasions when the confusion and bedlam pass that of a longshoremen's riot. To be more specific, a condition similar to the second night of Mardi Gras would, to us, rate above par.

I suppose a person accustomed to a household of normal size might have noted the coughing and snorting that was more remindful of the fourth day of a bronchial infection in a seal act than the Fourth of July in a private residence. And I guess a person who hadn't seen heavier combat action than that at Santo Domingo would have flinched a time or two at the spasmodic bursts of the most

accursed invention that ever came out of the Orient or anywhere else, namely the firecracker.

However, as far as we were concerned, it was a pretty peaceful fiesta. Even though it lacked the serenity of a picnic scene in a cigarette ad, the blast of slamming doors failed to shatter a single piece of the china cups my wife keeps packed in paper. What noise there was centered around the four who were in good enough shape to travel. But little did they know that the traveling days of this family in one group were over.

It wouldn't have mattered if we had been in that rare condition when one of the flock wasn't introducing some new, highly contagious virus to the herd; or if another pen of three weren't in the last stages of convalescence from some infirmity hitherto associated only with people living in extremely crowded urban sections.

For the time being, large families such as ours had better lie low.

Yes, even though large families haven't enjoyed much popularity since old Teddy Roosevelt's reign, we are now at our lowest ebb in history and are living symbols of the population explosion problem.

Considering the manner in which such notables as President Johnson, Ex-Chief Ike Eisenhower, and even

legislators from such sparsely populated sections as Alaska, are carrying on about what to do about curbing the human birth rate, we violators of the "more-than-four" rule had better restrict our activities and remain as inconspicuous as possible.

It may not be only the country's leaders who are coming after our scalps, for the men of the cloth are also becoming involved. Judging from the way the latter element reacted to the hornet's nest Charles Darwin stirred up many years ago, it doesn't require much imagination to predict that the very nature of the big-family problem will result in scores of cassocks being ripped at the seams, dozens of skull caps and beards being stomped and tugged, and countless Good Books being slammed around on pulpits.

So, with this in mind, it shouldn't be too difficult to understand why my wife and I have decided to stay home on holidays — or, for that matter, any kind of days.

To date, neither of us have felt any great need to explain our self-imposed exile to the children; nor have we thought it necessary to prepare them for whatever the reaction of the community will be when this development reaches its peak, as all the children were capable of holding up their heads after the Johnson landslide when

they were branded as the offspring of known Goldwater supporters.

Besides, the hardship of staying home is not a new experience for any of us. Practically ever since we set out to found this assemblage, we have spent approximately 99.44 percent of our leisure time within one block of our house.

Oh, in earlier years when we numbered only seven or eight, a few of our friends used to extend blanket invitations to cook-ins and cook-outs. Even after we were 10 there remained two or three couples with the courage to accept the challenge of feeding a tribe which would, on short notice, put the mess staff at Fort Sam Houston to hopping.

But for the most part our life has been a prosaic routine of going to and from the obstetrician's by way of the grocery store; back and forth from the pediatrician's by way of the grocery store; or remaining at home because either the obstetrician or pediatrician advised us to, and getting the groceries at odd moments when we weren't making other trips too numerous to mention, such as to the dentist's, the shoe store, etc.

This new stay-at-home crusade imposes only slight hardship on our way of life. True, we may miss the old days of loading the gang in the station wagon until it squatted

like a blue quail. But — who knows? — we may yet see the day when so many denizens of this planet have gone up in space that our nation will again encourage large families.

—(07/15/65)